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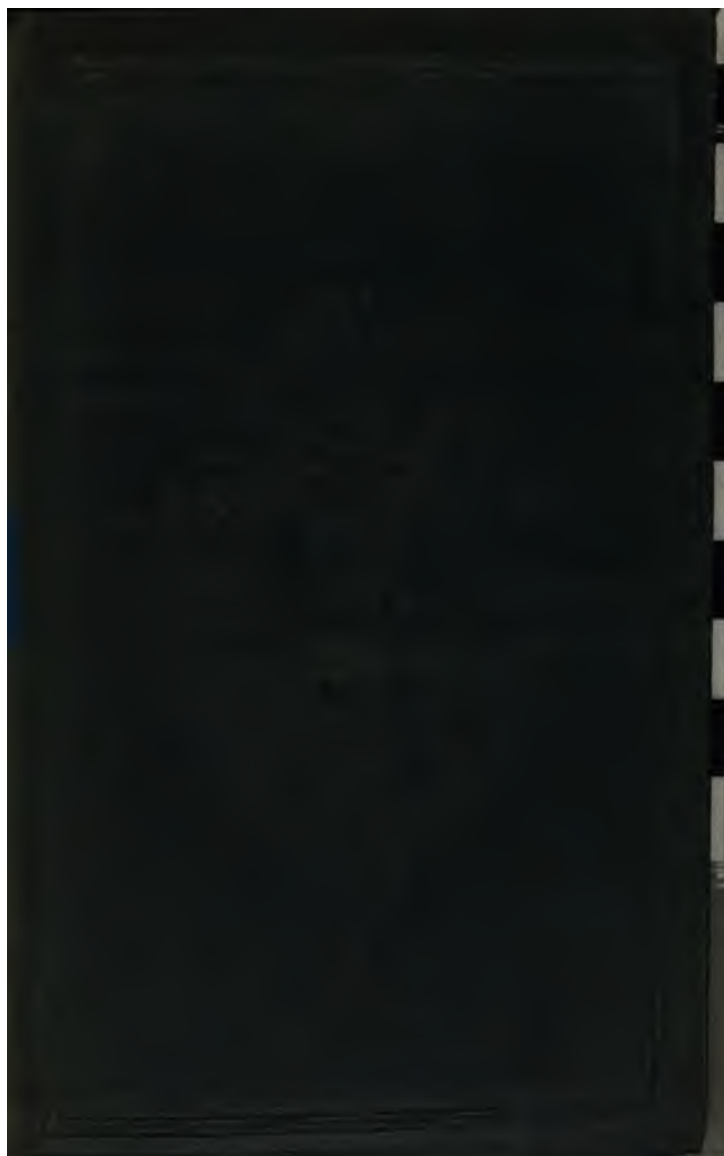
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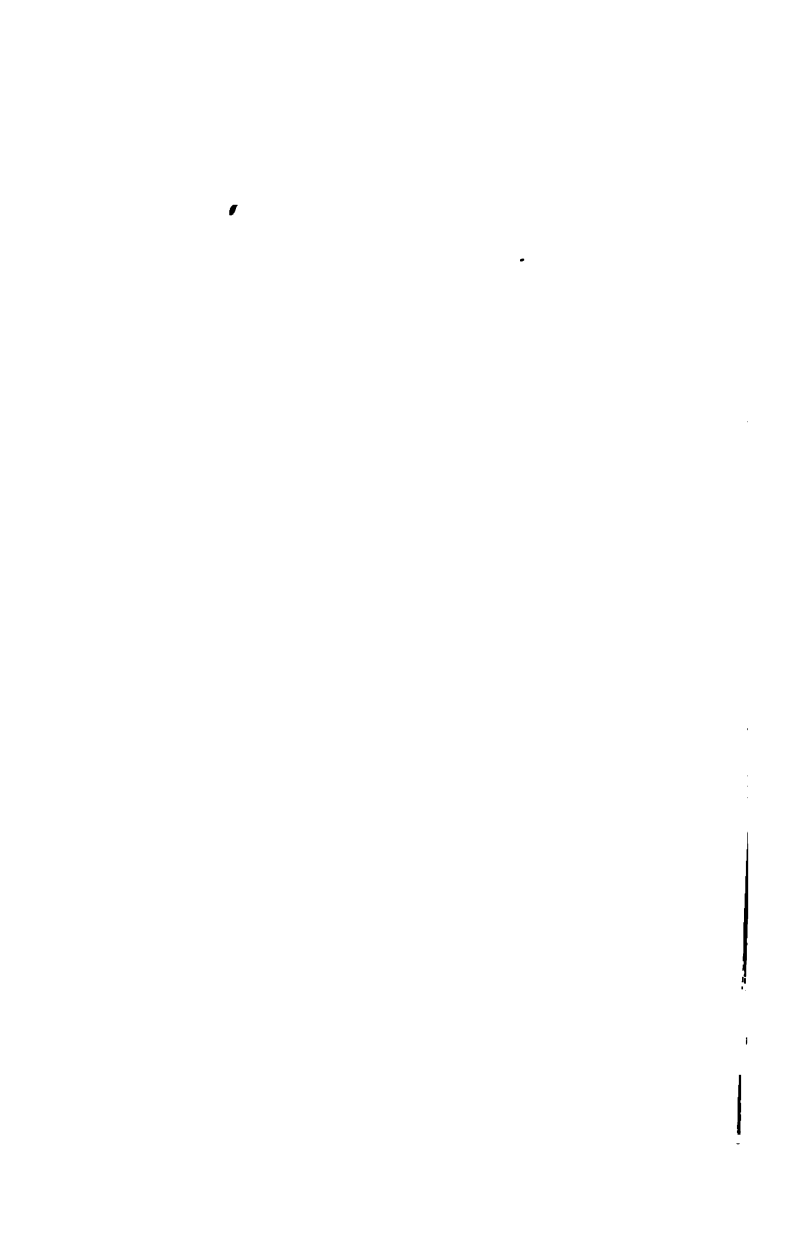
1026.







## GOOD AND BAD HABITS.



# GOOD AND BAD HABITS.

THREE SERMONS.

BY

THE REV. J. S. HOWSON, M. A.,

LATELY

ONE OF THE MASTERS IN THE COLLEGIATE SCHOOLS,  
LIVERPOOL.

LONDON;

J. & J. RIVINGTON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH YARD.

LIVERPOOL;

WAREING WEBB, CASTLE STREET.

MDCCCXLVI.

1026.





TO  
THE BOYS  
IN THE THREE SCHOOLS  
OF THE  
**Liverpool Collegiate Institution**  
THESE SERMONS ARE DEDICATED  
BY ONE  
WHO WAS LATELY  
ONE AMONG THEIR MASTERS  
AND WILL ALWAYS BE  
THEIR SINCERE FRIEND.

*Easter, 1846.*



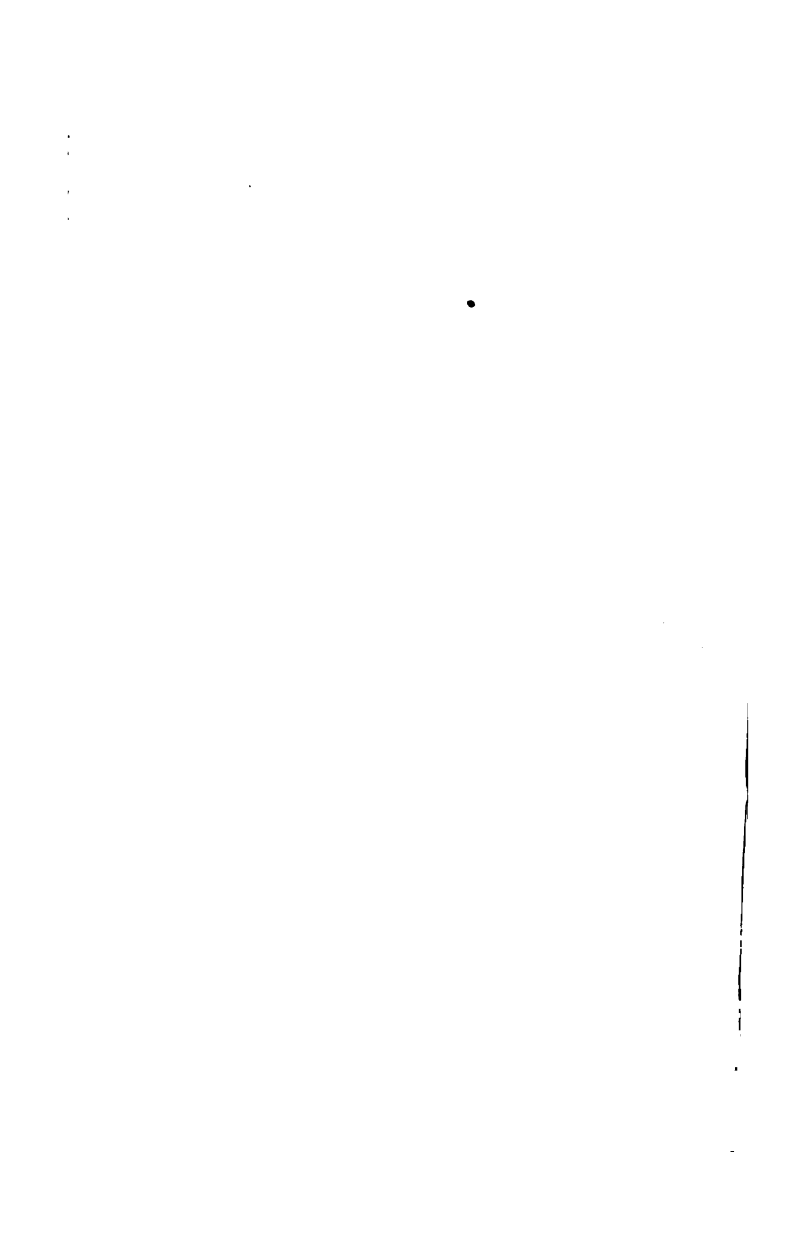
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## PREFACE.

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THE first and third of these Sermons were preached on behalf of the Schools connected with St. Mary's, Edge-hill. It did not seem necessary that their form should be altered; and I have a pleasure in printing them as they were originally written: for I cannot forget that I began my ministerial duties in that Church, and that I have received much personal kindness from many members of the congregation.

J. S. H.



## SERMON I.

Tout est éducation dans la vie humaine. Chaque année de notre existence est la conséquence des années qui précèdent, et la préparation de celles qui suivent. . . C'est parce qu' il y a dans tous les temps une *éducation accidentelle*, qu' il faut en balancer les effets par une *éducation préméditée*.

MADAME NECKER DE SAUSSURE.

## SERMON I.

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LEARN TO DO WELL.—*Isaiah* i. 17.

VERY little is said in the Bible about habits. Much is said about faith in God, about the fear of God, the love of God. No one who should wish to discourse on any of these principles of religion could be at a loss to find passages of Scripture to enforce them. He has only to open the Bible at random, and he will find them, in almost any page, ready to his hand. But concerning habits—their power over the character, and the mode of their formation—there is a very small amount of direct instruction; so small, that, wishing to address you on that subject this morning, I had almost a difficulty in choosing an appropriate text.



.And yet we are all agreed, both on the importance of habits and the manner of their growth. Why does a mother tremble, when her son is guilty of occasional acts of disobedience and rebellion, or when she sees him loitering in the neighbourhood of bad and dangerous companions? It is because she knows the power of custom. She knows that habits are formed by acts, and that, when formed, they govern the character. Why is the Christian instructor filled with uneasiness and anxiety, when he sees the symptoms of falsehood or idleness, or spitefulness or meanness? It is because he knows that every act is a link in the chain which is a habit, and that the chain, when once it is forged, is able to bind a man hand and foot. On this subject all men are agreed, the learned and the unlearned, heathen men and Christians. From the time when virtue and vice were first made topics of inquiry and discussion, the great influence acquired by trifling actions, if constantly repeated, has always been urgently insisted on

by every moralist. No reasonable man among ancient philosophers ever doubted it. No reasonable man doubts it now. Any Christians who should underrate the importance of habits, who should desire to withdraw the consideration of them from among the elements of practical Christianity, would be pronounced, by the common consent of all wise men, fanatical and absurd.

Here then is an apparent difficulty. That which we all agree is one of the most important parts of Christian morality, is not by any means a prominent subject in the Christian Scriptures. How is this? How is it that the Bible says so little about habits, when we all know that practical religion would cease to exist if habits were neglected? The answer is obviously this. It is taken for granted that we know it. It required no revelation to tell us—how what is difficult at first grows easy by practice,—how a man may become expert where once he was clumsy,—how he may acquire a liking for

what formerly disgusted him,—how a character may be formed by a continued course of conduct. All this we are able to learn without any revelation. Wherever the children of Adam have been gathered into a society, the facts from which this inference could be made, and the faculty of making it, have always existed. Human nature has its laws, and these laws may be discovered, so far as it is important for us to know them; and the law of habits has always been acknowledged and understood, though practically too often neglected. The Gospel gives us what we could *not* obtain for ourselves, or learn by our own inquiry; new doctrines, new motives, new facts; *facts* to which our feeble nature may cling with the tenacity of a helpless plant; *doctrines* which may train up our characters in the way they should go; and *motives* which may urge and promote our growth in all loveliness, and strength, and holy fruitfulness. The question of habits, this belongs to the *application* of the Gospel, the bringing of these new gifts to

bear upon human nature, which was and is the same. The science of these habits is to be treated of by those who write on Christian morals, the practice of them to be enforced by the preachers of the Gospel, the details to be watchfully attended to by every member of the Christian Church, by clergy and laity, by each one for himself.

God, I say, has given us in the Gospel doctrines, motives, and facts,—these three, and one thing more: He has given us *grace*,—the grace of the power of the Holy Ghost. Without this, it were vain to preach on habits. To sink deeper in our corruption, this would be our only progress. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?” Were it not for the Spirit’s grace, this would be our only gospel—an anxious question without an answer. May God be pleased to give us this grace, now, on this quiet Sunday morning, while we are meditating, for a short time, on the power and the growth of habits; and after-

wards, during our whole sojourn on earth, be it long or be it short, while, in the midst of changes and chances, and the contradiction of circumstances, and alternate joys and sorrows, and the heavy work of life, our characters are growing, forming, settling for eternity.

I propose to consider, first, the *power of habits*; and secondly, *the mode of their formation*.

On the first head, I will mention simply the *readiness* which custom gives us in doing what perhaps was very hard at first. When we have got a habit of doing anything, we are more inclined to do it than before; and likewise we do it more easily than before. The tendency to the action is increased, and the facility in doing it is also increased. And these two together make up what I mean by readiness.

Take first the case of an inward habit. There are habits within a man which no one sees but God. But God sees them; and they are the roots of that visible outward life which is seen by men. Take a habit, first, that goes no further than the thoughts and feelings. Now, *thoughts* and *feelings*, that have been accustomed to meet together in the mind, acquire (if I may so speak) a friendship for each other. The time comes when they never make their appearance separately. No sooner does one appear than it is followed by the other. Thus in the case of an uncharitable, censorious man: he thinks of his neighbour's faults, and immediately a feeling of dislike and contempt comes and occupies his mind. This is because he has given a lodging in his mind to these odious feelings, till they have learnt to claim it as a right; and the thoughts open the door to them, and they come in, as into a house swept and garnished. Or again, in the case of a devout man, a servant of Christ. Such an one thinks of his Saviour, and im-

mediately his heart rises in adoration and thanksgiving. "Behold I stand at the door and knock." His thoughts have been trained to hear that gentle knocking, and they open the door like obedient servants, and the love of Christ comes in.

And now go one step further. Take into your regard the *actions* which flow from thoughts and feelings. When certain thoughts and feelings have been accustomed to result in certain actions, those actions come to follow them almost necessarily and invariably. The body comes to obey the mind instinctively. A man allows himself to break out into angry expressions when his temper is excited; and by and by the fretful, violent, ungoverned words are always to be heard on every occasion of contradiction and irritation. He will say that he knows it is wrong, but that it is a habit—a bad habit. And this is true; it is a bad habit. The sinful motions of the tongue have learnt to follow, unreluctantly,

the sinful motions of the mind. Another man hears a tale of distress. Some one needs his sympathy, his relief, or his advice. A kind word will perhaps adjust all the uneasiness. Immediately he goes to see what can be done. It costs him no effort to do so. He has taken pains before this to set himself free from thoughts of selfishness, to entertain the feelings of benevolence, and to act in obedience to them. And now his feet are the willing servants of the impulses of his mind. Like the centurion at Capernaum, he is under authority, it is true,—under the authority of God; but he can say to his servant, “Do this, and he doeth it.”

Let this suffice for a statement of what I have called the *readiness* produced by a habit. Thoughts and feelings and actions are so intimately associated by frequent intercourse, that the one inevitably suggests the others. The thought calls up the feeling, and the feeling beckons to the action. It is a deep principle



of human nature, treated of by great philosophers. But no one, who will examine his own heart and conduct, has any need of a philosopher to explain it to him. It is the first and most obvious feature of a habit; and the commonest example is perhaps the best illustration of it.

What is the illustration which almost any one would fix upon? No doubt that of a drunkard. The love of drinking is usually an acquired taste. At first it is nothing more than the love of pleasant company, restlessness, and vanity, and the dislike of regular employment, and so forth. But afterwards it is a habit, one of the most pitiable and deplorable instances we could find of inward weakness and outward shame, bound together by a chain that is rarely broken. Put the cup before the drunkard, and you may predict what will follow as confidently as you could predict that spring will follow winter, and summer succeed to spring. The mere sight of the cup is followed instantly by the craving

that will not be denied, and that is followed instinctively by the reaching forth of the arm, and the closing of the hand on the cup, and the raising of it to the mouth. Probably no one but a drunkard can fully understand the force of that warning in the Book of Proverbs : "Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth its colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright;" no one but a drunkard, in his hours of depression, and trembling, and shame, when he feels indeed that "it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder." What a proof does every drunkard exhibit of the tremendous power of custom! Once his character was entirely respectable. He was as decent a man as you would find in the whole neighbourhood. He brought his wages to his family on Saturday. He behaved well to his wife and children, and no one had a word against him. But now he is sadly changed. He was fond of good company; and he began to take his glass with them, like a foolish man, and now he has got into the way of it.

There is a great deal of meaning in that common expression, 'He has got into the way of it.' It seems to speak of a road, that once was a faint and irregular track, but now has become worn and trodden by his own footsteps. He knows it well now, and walks along it easily. The way of sinners is a beaten track at last; and so too—(let us not for our own comfort's sake forget this)—is the way of the righteous. "Enoch walked with God." "Noah was a just man, and walked with God." These are the characters of two of those who "died in faith," being "persuaded of the promises." This is the *habit of godliness*. Walking after our own "ungodly lusts," walking after "the counsels of our own heart," walking after "the flesh," these are scriptural descriptions of the *habit of sin*.—My brethren, each of us is making a path for himself, whether he knows it or not, trampling down the obstacles by small degrees, and daily causing it to be plainer and wider and smoother. This path, which each one of us is forming for himself,

with the footsteps of his feet,—whither,—  
whither does it lead?

There are other considerations, illustrating the power of habits, which I do not willingly pass over. There is a certain *unconsciousness*, which comes on after a time; and a very awful thing it is to think of. When a man is quite accustomed to do a thing, he forgets how he learnt to do it, and he does it unconsciously. And especially there is that most formidable truth, most formidable in one aspect, and most elevating in another, that custom will not only induce a readiness in action, and an unconsciousness of what is done, but often brings about an actual *change of mind*, a change of views and opinions; so that a man no longer believes what he believed before, but something quite different. But we must pass now to the other division of our subject, and inquire how habits are formed. If it be true that they exercise so despotic a power over our whole

existence, it is of the utmost importance that we should know how they come to be possessed of an influence at once so penetrating and so universal.

Here too we will limit ourselves to one topic, and content ourselves with the statement of this simple principle, that habits are formed by acts—*general habits by particular acts.*

This is what an apprentice is taught when he is learning a trade. He has a habit to acquire, on which his prospects in life depend. If he learns it well and thoroughly, the probable consequence will be respectability and a sure maintenance, and a provision for his old age. He has a short time to learn it in; the opportunity is given him once, and will never be afforded him again. Therefore, if he is a prudent apprentice, he begins *immediately*. He turns his hands, not without awkwardness, but without delay, to those kinds

of acts which he hopes by and by to do skilfully and easily, and on the skilful doing of which he knows his livelihood to depend. He is not discouraged by frequent failures. Above all, he is not weary of doing the same thing *again and again*. He may not reject a piece of work because it is trifling, and soon accomplished, and might be done by anybody. It is by frequent doing of these *little things* and *easy things* that he comes at last to be a "cunning artificer," that need not be ashamed of his workmanship.

We, too, are apprentices for heaven. We, too, have a habit to acquire: and the time is short; and it is given us only once. Our character, too, is to be formed by acts; we must begin, then, immediately. If we fail, we must not be discouraged. We must begin again. We must not "despise the day of small things." Above all, we must not say, 'This is important, and that is not important.' We must make much of little things. That is the most

really important which is most closely woven into the context of our daily life. It is not important that we should dream of being stoned like St. Stephen, or beheaded like St. Paul; but it is important that we should love our friends, and be respectful to our parents, and control our tempers, and practise self-denial, and be temperate in all things; and pray to God in the morning, and examine ourselves in the evening, and keep a check upon our eyes and our thoughts in church;—these are the little things which are so great, and the easy things which are so difficult; these are the things which we must do again and again, and never be weary; these are the *acts* which form the *habits*.

But a Christian may say, looking at others who are so saintly and devoted, and thinking of his own most miserable indolence and unfruitfulness, ‘How shall I ever attain to such love, such faith, such zeal, such patience, such perfect acquiescence in the will of God? I am

helpless and miserable ; my right hand forgets her cunning ; my heart is ever starting aside, like a broken bow ; my best strength is utter weakness.' Oh no ! be not discouraged, if these are indeed the enquirings of an honest heart, — if indeed they are the weakness of the flesh, and not the unwillingness of the spirit. Be not discouraged. You will still "learn to do well." If an apprentice, who had been trying in vain to execute some work that was before him, and had been failing again and again, and then began to think of all his hope of subsistence, and perhaps the support of an aged mother, entirely depending on the skilfulness of those unfortunate hands, — were to turn to his master with tears in his eyes, and say, ' Really this is so difficult, — I shall never accomplish it, — I am quite in despair : ' — his answer, if he were a kind master, would be no other than this : ' Oh no, be not discouraged ; you must go on perseveringly and patiently ; you must try again and again : begin to-day, and to-morrow the work will be easier, and the next day easier



still; and in due time your workmanship will be all you could desire.' So it must be said to those who desire to attain the habit of religion, and to acquire the character of a saint. Be not discouraged. It is safe for you to do the same things often; and it ought not to be grievous.\* Begin to-day. Others have been discouraged, as you are discouraged; and have succeeded, as you hope to succeed. God intends that you should learn by experience. His grace is leading you. In due time you will reap, if you faint not.†

\* See Philipp. iii. 1.

† "It is impossible to perform continually benevolent *acts*, without nourishing the *feeling* of benevolence in the heart. He who visits the fatherless and the widow in their affliction, though at first he may find the task irksome, and may do it only in obedience to God's command, yet will soon experience the pleasure which is attached to the exercise of kindness; a fountain of new emotions will spring up within him, and a tender sympathy with suffering will make him seek those labours as a privilege and a happiness, which before were shrunk from with repulsion. In a similar manner, the more directly religious affections will be sustained by the reiteration of devotional employments. Every prayer

This has been a poor and imperfect account of the formation of habits. To exhibit it com-

that is breathed, each tribute of praise that is offered, will strengthen the spirit of trust and adoration, of dependence on God and gratitude to Him, in the heart of the worshipper; and that, not only by their direct operation, in the fulfilment of the promise that to them who ask shall be given, but by their indirect effect also, upon the moral nature of him who complies with these appointed means of gaining God's favour. Thus his life will be an ascent from individual acts to uniform feelings, from habits of outward conduct to habits of thought. For in the regulation of his *thoughts*, the same process will go on, which began in the regulation of his deeds. First, particular trains of thought will be checked, and others fostered; till, finally, the principle of association will be brought to aid that which it originally hindered, and will supply suggestions of good instead of evil. Thus will purity of mind, humility, charity, faith, and gentleness constitute the habitual language in which the man holds converse with himself, and at last, heavenward affections will gain the decided predominance over the carnal mind; the spell of low appetites and earthborn passions will no longer fetter his holier and higher longings; the grace of God, coming to the aid of steadfast purposes and persevering efforts, will have subdued the evil imaginations which fought against it, and brought into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."—*Rev. W. J. Conybeare. (Whitchall Sermons.)*

pletely, it ought to be shewn how different the result is, when a man looks for the formation of his character from the influence of mere *feelings*: how miserably they leave a man stranded on the shore, when other vessels, that chose a deeper channel, are far away, safely on their voyage. And again it ought to be shewn, how great is the difference between *saying* and doing; how the soul is impoverished and exhausted by a multitude of words, yea, even by good words multiplied out of season, and how it is strengthened, on the contrary, by a patient continuance in well doing. But these things must be left to another opportunity, if God shall vouchsafe to grant it, and I turn now from the general consideration of the subject of habits, to address two different classes of persons:—First, those whose habits are unformed, on behalf of themselves:—Secondly, those whose habits are formed, on behalf of others.

First, those whose habits are unformed, on behalf of themselves. This class, in strict

truth, includes nearly all of us. Few of us would dare to say that our habits are formed. But I am speaking particularly to the young. Above all things, my younger,—my youngest brethren, beware of trifling with sin. It will grow under your hands. You do not know how fast it will grow. Nothing grows half so fast. If you could look forward a few years, it would make you wiser. If you knew what it is to be tormented with wandering thoughts, when you would fain meditate on Christ, and your own soul, and the world to come,—you would pray to God to make you attentive now to the service in Church. If you knew what it is to be borne down against your will by indolence of body, and reluctance of mind, when you ought to be serving God with a ready mind and willing body,—you would strive against all idleness and indifference at your work. If you knew what it is to struggle with a strong lust, rising fiercely upon you when you have once overthrown it, and returning quickly when you thought it had fled,—you would never open

your ears again, to listen to wicked words. You little know what you do when you trifle with sin. You little know, that you are building a wall between yourself and the sun. Every sin (*i. e.* when you do what you know to be wrong,) is a stone added to this great wall. Every lingering hesitation (*i. e.* when you know what is right, but love what is wrong,) is like the mortar, which fastens the stones together. It is soft at first, but it soon grows hard. Every day the wall is rising higher and higher. Can you not see, when the sun shines on it in the morning, that the shadow is wider and darker than it used to be. And by and by it will be so high (though you may wonder when I tell you), that you will never see the sun shining over it again: and you will have to live for ever in the shadow of that black wall, which you have built with your own hands. If you could see it, as it will be, you would wonder how ever you could have built it: and it is indeed a wonder to see what Satan can do, by the help of the youngest hands. But there is another

wonder as great as this,—how God can ordain praise out of the mouths of babes and sucklings. And you too might learn this heavenly music, if you would but begin to practise it now. Oh take warning in time ! It is never too soon to “learn to do well ;” but it may be too late. “Be not deceived. God is not mocked.” (You have often heard these words from the Bible : and you can easily understand them)—“Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”\*

And now let me turn to those whose habits are comparatively formed, and address them on behalf of others. Let me turn to those who are past the age of childhood and early youth. No doubt this is a class containing more than one kind of character. There are, it may be, first, some who are like those of whom St. John speaks, —“strong, and having the word of God abiding in them, and having overcome the wicked one.” And again, some who are

\* Gal. vi. 7.

below this happy state, but yet successfully tending towards it. And thirdly, some whose characters have settled in a different direction, whose hearts have become hardened, their motives worldly, their whole moral being alienated from God. But to-day these distinctions may be forgotten ; and I would address, as one class, the whole number of those who, from the time of life at which they are arrived, may be said to have their habits formed ;—and whom I well know I ought to address with respect on all occasions, and especially on one like the present.

Now I pray you to consider, that every child, however much neglected by those who ought naturally to care for him, or however poor and unable to educate him his parents may chance to be, will receive an *education*, whether his natural guardians and responsible neighbours will or no. There are two kinds of education. There is, on the one hand, what has been called an *accidental* education, and what we may

name a *deliberate* education, on the other. Between these you must take your choice. If, on the one hand, you provide that those children, over whom you have an influence direct or indirect, be brought under Christian training, then you put them into the way of "learning to do well," you are fellow-workers with God in the formation of godly habits, you have done what in you lies to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and you may look for a fulfilment of the promise, "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old he will not depart from it." But if, on the other hand, you leave these children to themselves, you do not leave them to remain as they are. They have relatives older than themselves, not always the most watchful friends, or the best examples. They have companions, oftentimes the worst that can be found. Their eyes are quick, their ears are open, their feelings are lively, their hearts are soft, their habits are forming, their characters are growing. Each



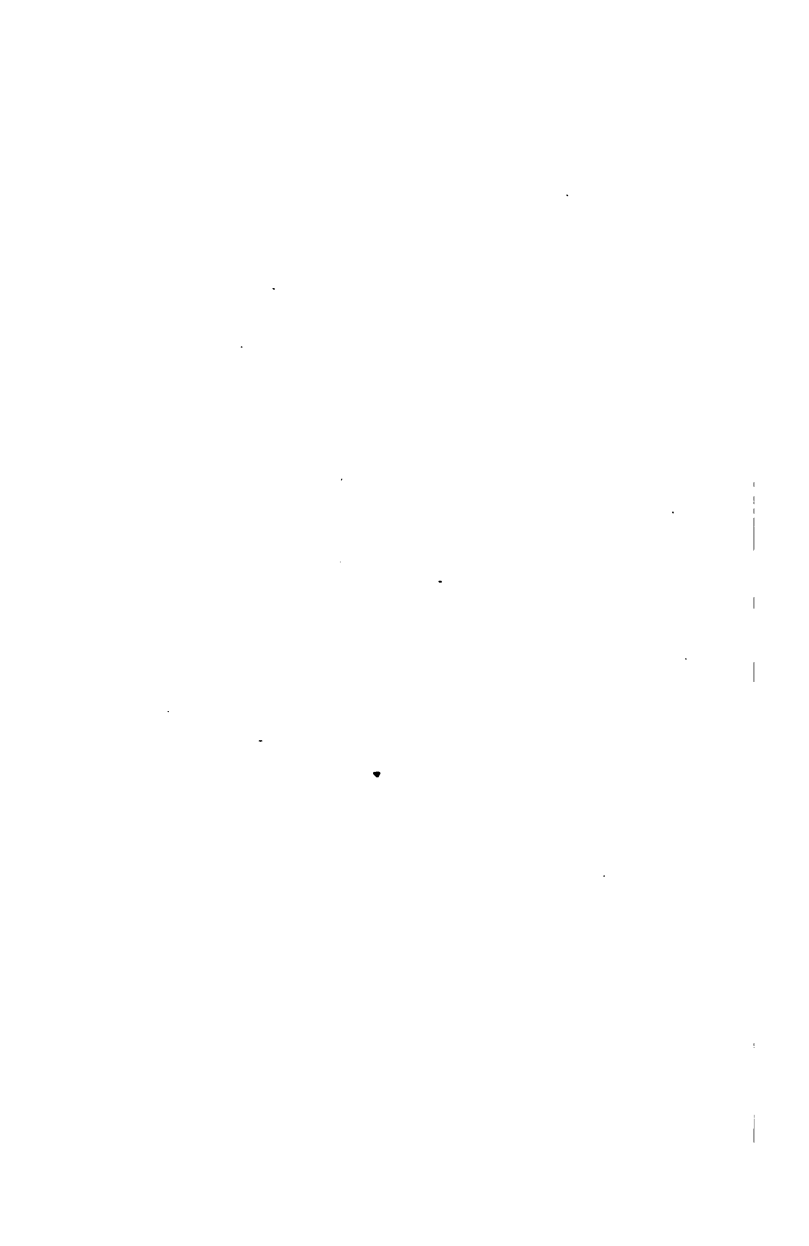
thing that they do is the consequence of something that went before, and the cause of something that is to follow. This is what is meant by an *accidental* education. It is the education which will go on, if you do not give them a *deliberate* one. Between the two you must take your choice. If you would wish that they should know their duty towards God and man, that they should learn to call upon God, and 'honour His holy name and His word,' that they should learn obedience and honesty, temperance and chastity, and that they should be dismissed one by one into the world, with kind wishes and cheerful expectations, to do their duty in that state of life to which it may please God to call them,—then employ every effort, active and personal efforts when it is possible, or, when that is impracticable, every indirect effort which your station and property may permit, to bring them at an early age, and continue them for a sufficient period, under Christian teaching and training. Give them a deliberate education. Or, do you prefer the

other? Remember, you cannot stop the growth and development of character. You cannot dis-sever the connexion between thoughts and feelings and actions. You cannot hinder acts from building themselves into habits. You cannot put a strong hand upon a law of God, and say that it shall cease to exist. If you shut up a child in a dungeon, he will grow,—grow, it may be, to be deformed and weak, blind and hideous; but still he will grow. Nothing but death will stop his growth. Do you, then, prefer the accidental education? The breathing of an atmosphere heavy with worldliness and selfishness, or, peradventure, teeming with oaths and impurity; the filling of the mind with foolish and idle fancies, or, peradventure, with polluted and abominable images; the warming of the heart with hot and violent passions; the strengthening of the inward man for the service of the Enemy of God,—is *that* the education you intend for your own young relations, or for the children of your neighbours that are poor?

Something is to be decided on that subject to-day, something in the collection for the schools, but more I hope hereafter. Oh, I trust that we shall not merely be able to say that on such a day, there passed before our minds the thought of ragged uncared-for children, loitering neglectedly at the corners of remote and dismal streets, and about the doors of squalid and poverty-stricken dwelling-places; that for once we pitied them, and for once we gave a subscription, that they might be sent to school, if by any means they might "learn to do well." God forbid that this should be all! And God forbid that by any of us this subject of habits should be lightly thought of, or soon forgotten! May He grant, rather, that this day may be to us the beginning of some habitual care for the education of poor children! And that for our ourselves also, it may be as "the beginning of days!" In the world to come, our places will be assigned according to our characters. Characters are formed by habits. Habits by acts. Begin to-day. Oh

that we might hereafter remember that on such a day we began, in some little unnoticed detail of conduct, to "cease to do evil, and learn to do well!" That on such a day we laid the foundation-stone of one holy habit, with the solemn ceremony of stedfast resolutions and fervent prayers, and in the ever-blessed Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!

**TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY, 1845.**



**SERMON II.**

From these two observations together, that *practical habits* are formed and strengthened by repeated acts, and that *passive impressions* grow weaker by being repeated upon us, it must follow that active habits may be gradually forming and strengthening by a course of acting upon such and such motives and excitements, whilst these motives and excitements themselves are, by proportionable degrees, growing less sensible — *i. e.*, are continually less and less sensibly felt, even as the active habits strengthen. And experience confirms this.

BISHOP BUTLER.

## SERMON II.

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HIS BONES ARE FULL OF THE SIN OF HIS YOUTH,  
WHICH SHALL LIE DOWN WITH HIM IN THE  
DUST.—*Job* xx. 11.

FOUR Sundays ago we were considering the subject of habits. Four weeks are soon passed away, and, at ordinary times, they bring with them no visible change. And yet all of us are changed, even in that short interval. The season has been advancing, and a growth has been going on, gradual but sure, invisible but inevitable. We are not what we were four Sundays ago. Each of us is different from what he was. A building has been proceeding, though, like Solomon's temple, it has been rising in silence. Chains have been in pro-



gress under diligent hands, though no sound of hammer has been heard. Link by link, our acts have been fastening themselves together into habits. Step by step, our characters have been advancing. More or less, we have, on the one hand, been "ceasing to do evil, and learning to do well," or, on the other hand, we have been continuing to do evil, and learning to do worse.

The change, it is most likely, is almost imperceptible,—imperceptible to others, and perhaps to ourselves. Four weeks is a short portion of an average life. And yet there are times in a man's life, when a few weeks will make a visible and conscious change in his spiritual existence. We sometimes see in spring, when bright days and warm showers come upon the earth, after a long season of comfortless weather, that the unfolding of the leaves goes on with a sudden and marvellous quickness. And we sometimes see in autumn, that the woods will remain for many days in

silent and motionless beauty, till a sudden frost comes, and reveals, as in a moment, the change which has been secretly and invisibly advancing from day to day. So is it sometimes with the soul. There are seasons of "refreshing from on high," when it seems to be conscious of a rapid heavenward growth. And there are times, when there takes place such a dropping off of all the fair tokens of Christian profession, as renders visible, once for all, that change which the downward progress of sin has been silently preparing. It may be that something of this sort has happened to us, within so short a time as a few weeks. It may be that resolutions have been more earnestly formed, and, by Divine grace, kept better than before, and we have experienced a prosperous growth towards God, and towards happiness. Or it may be that transient impressions have come over us, and departed—have made a stir and a dropping among the leaves, and left us bare. It may be, or it may not be so : God knoweth. But this is certain, that a change, visible or invisible, has

passed upon us ; we are not what we were a few months, or even a few weeks ago. And in returning once more to reflect on the strength and the growth of habits, we have need to approach the subject with anxiety and deep solemnity.

We considered, *First*, the *power* which they possess ; *Secondly*, the *mode of their formation* ; and I propose to recur to these topics in the same order to-day. I wish to enlarge somewhat further on this power, and the reasons of it ; and then to offer to your notice some reflections which may illustrate the manner of their growth.

It was remarked that a habit is powerful, because custom gives us a *readiness* in doing what was hard at first. By readiness I mean, to repeat the same words again, that we are more inclined to do it than before, and do it

more easily than before. The tendency to the action is increased, and the facility in performing it is also increased. It was further implied, that this readiness is the necessary result of a peculiarity in our natural constitution. Man is a complicated being. There is in him that which thinks, that which feels, and that which acts; and these three parts are so made, as to co-operate harmoniously together. They were meant by God to act together,—and they learn to act together. As a man's life goes on, they become associated with each other more and more closely, by mutual assistance and mutual understanding,—so that both within a man (in his mind) certain connexions must be formed between *thoughts* and *feelings*, and within and without (from the heart to the conduct) similar connexions of *thought* with *feeling*, and *feeling* with *action*. It is not a matter of choice, whether this connexion shall subsist or not. A man cannot unyoke the several parts of his being, and turn them out to travel independently. The choice consists in this,—



## SERMON II.

courage fail you, but begin immediately. If they urge you to warn a friend of his faults, be not afraid to do it. Speak, if your heart is full. You would tell him at once, if you saw a serpent in his path. If they urge you to works of benevolence, the right course is to go and set about them. Dissipate all false notions of ease and comfort. Hindrances will vanish as you go on. Readiness will come with the habit. Your thoughts, and feelings, and actions will move in harmony together. A three-fold cord will be silently forming, the parts intertwining together, and mutually strengthening one another, as you advance on the walk of life.

And now, having spoken sufficiently of the readiness, which is one great mark of a habit, and one secret of its power, I will turn to another, almost more formidable, which we may call the *unconsciousness* of a habit. What I mean is this : when a man is quite accustomed to do a thing, he does it without thinking of it. We

see this exemplified in what we call a man's peculiarities. What attracts the notice of every one else, entirely escapes his own. We see it again in the dexterity which people acquire in the motions of the body, and in works of skill. It seems that we can set no limit to the cunning adroitness, which can be attained to by practice, and exercised without thinking, and without remembering the steps by which it was learnt. To watch the little children's fingers, in one of our great manufactories, as they busy themselves with the threads, and nimbly adapt themselves to the motions of the wheels, is almost like a miracle to those who have not acquired the habit. We have a proverb which says that custom is a second nature. And it is true of our moral as well as our physical nature. It is true there also, that in proportion as we acquire the habit of this or that course of conduct, we forget how we learnt it, we follow it unconsciously. The more perfectly we have acquired the habit, the more unconsciously do we follow it.



This is a law which God has been pleased to impress upon our nature. His intention is that we should do His will, that all our energies of body, soul, and spirit should move steadily and calmly and collectedly in His service. This *could* not be, if we were *always* reflecting on the details of our conduct, if the whole body of our actions were at all times penetrated by a consciousness of our motives. It could not be. We should be, at best, living half in God, and half in ourselves. Oh! blessed are they that have learnt this unconscious habit of joyful obedience: who serve God without effort and without reluctance: who rise, as the sun rises, to travel his appointed journey: and who sleep as those who have been guided, all day long, in the way of peace. "Surely He giveth His beloved peace." Surely His beloved ones find that "His yoke is easy and His burden light."

This is what God intends for us. This is the law of customary life, whereby His grace and love would lead us onward to peace and

happiness. But then, the law is not suspended if we turn from Him, and follow our own way, and walk after the counsels of our own heart. It is still true, that, as our habits are formed, we shall follow them unconsciously. At first, it may be, the way of a transgressor is hard. He is stung by self-reproaches, often and severely; but in due time the path is more open, and the thorns are less frequent; and when he has travelled far, he loses all remembrance of the steps which have brought him to the land he is arrived at. He forgets all that long series of acts, which have made him what he is. The last faint echoes of his early sins have died away, one by one. He did not listen to them, when they used to come, now and then, upon his ears, across the long waste of his advancing life; and now they are heard no longer. And yet these very sins have made him the man he is. "His bones are full of the sins of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust."

But I think we should fail to estimate the full power of habits, were we not to go one step further. Not only does a customary course of conduct produce a certain forgetfulness and unconsciousness in the mind, but *the mind itself is changed*. A man, by acting in such or such a manner, may come to think in such or such a manner. A system of life, continued through many years, may so change him, that he sees things in totally new points of view, and that he no longer believes what he believed before, but something altogether different.

Imagine a group of travellers, looking from an eminence in some rich country in the south, upon a rich and luxuriant plain, where villages are seen half concealed among the vineyards, and a river flows through long reaches of waving corn-fields towards a city that rises in the centre, with noble buildings, and spires of churches, and a great cathedral, while the sea can be seen far off in the distance, with the sun shining on it, and ships at anchor. And

suppose these travellers to be, one a merchant, and another a politician, and a third a painter, and a fourth a poet. And what are they thinking of? It is hardly likely that any of them could gaze unmoved on such a prospect. But how different are the thoughts and feelings which take possession of their minds! Their different habits of life have made them different men. There might have been a time when they were boys together, engaged in the same studies and enjoying the same amusements, and no one could have prophesied the changes which a few years could make. But those years have passed away, in different employments, changing their minds imperceptibly to themselves : and now they are different men. They cannot look at the same scene with the same feelings. They cannot take the same view of the same subject.

This sort of change of mind is a good and a happy one. It is so ordained by God, that men may be fitted for doing their duty in that state of life, to which in His providence He calls

them. It is a good thing when a man gets used to his work. "If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?" But there is a change of mind, caused in the same manner, which is neither a good nor a happy one. There is such a thing as a repentance unto death, brought about by habits of sin: and this is the most formidable feature of a habit, and the most alarming illustration of its power. Readiness may be unlearned, unconsciousness may be awakened, but blindness,—“if the light that is within be darkness, how great is that darkness!” And yet it is to be feared that such cases are often to be found, may be found perhaps among those who punctually present themselves at public worship, and listen attentively to sermons. Men of this character are (we have reason to fear) not uncommon: men, who, when they were young, had sound views on christian doctrine, not without some anxiety for the salvation of their souls: but they trifled with their convictions: they went on quietly

sinning in spite of the rebukes of their conscience: and now they have come to believe what they wish to be true. But they believe a lie. They have substituted for the mercy and justice of the true God, the mercy without justice of a God of their own creating. They have put morality in the place of the atonement; and practically blotted out from their system of religion the blood of Christ, which alone can blot out our sins. Alas! "they are filled with the fruit of their own ways." The seeds have been sown; but they might have paused before they sowed them; those seeds, those little actions, scattered over so wide a field. The crop has grown; but they might have kept it down even then, by nipping it in the blade. And now the harvest is reaped. It is now too late. The harvest is reaped, and laid up in the garner. They are *filled* with the *fruit* of *their own ways*.

But here again, it is true that a good course of life may result in a change of mind most

blessed, most joyful. Many a man has been brought by right acting, to right thinking. "If a man will do His will," says our Lord, "he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." Many a man has been brought by this path, from the slippery places of doubt and uneasiness, to have his feet set upon the rock of firm and steady belief. "Judge me, O Lord, for I have walked in mine integrity: I have trusted also in the Lord; therefore I shall not slide. Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart. For thy lovingkindness is before mine eyes: and I have walked in thy truth." These should be the words, and this the practice, of every one who is in doubt and perplexity on religious subjects. Let him walk in his integrity. Let him deal fairly with his conscience. Let him walk in God's truth, so far as he knows it; and gradually he will know more of it. For it is written that, "unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness," and that "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

And now let us turn to the second part of our subject, *the manner of the growth of habits*. It was said that habits are formed by acts; *general habits by particular acts*. Take care of the pence, and the pounds will take care of themselves. Plant your trees, and in time you will have a wood. A seaman becomes expert, by making many voyages. A man becomes a musician, by practising music. A man becomes good, by doing what is good.

We all of us know and believe this; but so few of us act upon it, that it is not useless for us to turn it over well in our minds. The truth that habits are formed by acts, is so closely connected with all sound safe theology, all sober healthy practice, "all joy and peace in believing," that I would not willingly leave any argument untouched, which might bring it out into distinct and conspicuous importance. For this purpose, one of the most useful methods, especially in these days, is to contrast



the results of *action* and of *feeling*,—the results of deliberate assiduous practice on the one hand, and of emotion unaccompanied by practice on the other.

Now our feelings are a very sacred and solemn part of our nature. No man can trifle with his feelings, without bringing punishment on himself. We can hardly overrate their importance, as to their bearing both on our duty and our happiness. But they were given us for a purpose. They were given, to impel us to action. The emotions of fear and abhorrence, of pity, and love, and gratitude, were given us, not merely that they might rise and fall within us, as the tide which ebbs and flows, but that they might carry us easily and quickly through channels of appropriate conduct. Now this being the case, we have two courses open to us. We may follow the law of our nature ; when good impulses come upon us, we may go where these impulses lead us ; and if this is continued, the habit strengthens, while the feelings

decay. As time goes on, we feel less, no doubt, but we do more. Or we may simply acquiesce in the emotions, enjoying them if they are enjoyable, and resign ourselves to the soft luxurious flow of our feelings; and then as time goes on, when the feelings decay, (for indeed they will decay, they will not remain with us always,) we shall be faint and languid, no strength in our limbs, no habits in our life. Picture to yourself two different characters, such as may be found anywhere, often in the same family; one reading stories of human misery and distress, and weeping over imaginary sorrows, but doing nothing to seek out and alleviate that real distress which exists in the world; and the other, with practical and watchful benevolence, prompt to give succour and advice, and counting all self-denial a gain, if so be that the necessities of others may be relieved. Now the probability is, that after a time the emotions of both these persons will become less overpowering: the one will be able to read affecting stories without being affected: the other will

be able to see the spectacle of human misery with more equanimity of mind.\* But there is this difference. The one will have acquired the habit of doing right things in the right way, with an inward peace in the heart, "godliness with contentment;" the other will feel a desolate void within, and a failing and a weakness in the life, like the languor that is left after a long and feverish illness.

This is no imaginary difference : and it appertains to all our religious feelings, as well as to that of benevolence, to which alone it has

\* Perception of distress in others is a natural excitement, passively to pity, and actively to relieve it; but let a man set himself to attend to, inquire out, and relieve distressed persons, and he cannot but grow less and less sensibly affected with the various miseries of life, with which he must become acquainted, when yet, at the same time, benevolence, considered not as a passion, but as a practical principle of action, will strengthen; and whilst he passively compassionates the distressed less, he will require a greater aptitude actively to assist and befriend them.—(*Butler's Analogy*, pt. I., ch. v., s. 1.)

been here applied. But let each of us make the application for himself; and let us give a few moments to one consideration which yet remains.

Let us only, while passing from this part of our subject, lift up one earnest prayer to Almighty God, that we may be delivered from an empty unpractical religion,—that, through His powerful and continual help, our impulses may be knit into habits, and our emotions condensed into principles.

The subject of the formation of habits will be left incomplete, unless we at least glance at one other point; and, besides contrasting feelings and acts, in their effects on the character, say something of the contrast between *words* and *actions*, in their effect on the character. The soul may be weakened by much talking, as well as by much feeling. And especially, there is reason to apprehend

that this kind of spiritual impoverishment is far from unfrequent in an age like that in which we live; when there is so much profession of religion, so much ferment on religious subjects; when so many sacred topics mingle themselves in the common thoughts of our daily life; and when religion is so mixed up with the sentiment and poetry of life. It is so respectable now to be devout,—we can so easily find sympathy in the expression of pious feelings,—it is so easy, so very easy, to gain a character even for a peculiar sanctity, and exalted devotedness, that we have more than ordinary reason to look closely at our conduct,—at what we *do*, not what we *say*. We may get this kind of character by mere words; by talking of the things of Christ in an earnest way, as if we felt them deeply. And all this time, while men are speaking well of us, a weakening may be going on in our inward frame, a moral decrepitude may be coming on,—because our words outrun our experience; because our acting lags behind our profession. For this cause, it is to

be feared, "many are weak" among us. That which men see and admire may only be a hectic flush, the symptom of consumption. Our bones, if not full of the sins of our youth, may be sinking into feebleness and languor. Great is the void left by copious words gushing from an empty heart. It is dangerous to be so extravagant on an empty purse. Mere words are an exhausting crop, that impoverishes the soil. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord! Lord! shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven,"—not every one who talks well, who is well thought of,—but he whose nerves are strung to obedience, whose feet and hands are accustomed to walk and work in the way of His commandments.

If this be true of *religious* words; if these are in danger of impoverishing the land; if such caution is requisite even here; what are we to say of all that multitude of idle words which we are daily pouring forth, at all times, and in all

companies,—of all that multitude of wandering thoughts, that restless and unthrifty population, which we have allowed to come in and occupy, and eat up the land,—and of all that indolence of body which lays its languid benumbing hands on our best and most anxious efforts? And then to think that these things have been going on for years, while the world has been moving forwards to its great consummation, and our own time of death and judgment has been drawing so near; and that still they remain, haunting us when we kneel in church, and following us into society, and returning with us to our solitude at home,—enemies still unsubdued, habits still uncorrected. Oh! here it is, in the common things of our common life, that we feel the power of habits; that we discover the secret of our spiritual impoverishment. The first thing perhaps we encounter in the morning is a *habit*, when we do not imitate the example of Him who rose before the day for our sakes, and, becoming poor that we might be rich, prayed to His Father. “Yet

a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep : so shall thy *poverty* come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man." The last thing we see in the evening is a *habit*, when, on examining the actions and words of the day, we find how that old sin of foolish-talking, which we had hoped at length to escape, has been betraying us and injuring us again ; and we feel, in the weakness of our souls, that "in all labour there is profit, but the talk of the lips tendeth only to *penury*."

The wincing of our consciences, when these things are mentioned, shows us how much we all have to do with the subject we have been considering, and brings it at once from the wide region of speculation within the narrow circle of our personal experience. Here, in the recesses of our private life, we see what habits are, how strong they are, and how they grow. And here it is, in silence, and patience,



and strong self-discipline, that the great work is to be done, the slow unwinding of the bands of our sins, and the gradual building up of the "new man in Christ Jesus." I remember being much struck with the words which a converted heathen once employed, in a message which he was sending to a friend. There is often a force and a freshness in the expressions of recent converts from idolatry, which lays bare the invisible world with a power far beyond our common conventional phrases. He was a New Zealander, and the words were these: 'Here I sit thinking, and untying the rope of the devil.' He felt the power of the habits of his heathen life, and he found that solitude, and self-inspection, and patient thought were useful in overcoming them. It is indeed a work most useful, most necessary, but at the same time most difficult. Hardly anything is more difficult than the scrutiny of our own conduct, and the realization, along with it, of the invisible world. But here, too, habit comes in to help us, and what was hard at first, becomes easier

in time.\* We may apply to the whole subject of private self-discipline, the words which a great and good man has used on the reading of the scriptures. 'Read them carefully,' he says, 'and read them often; and they will bring before our minds the very thoughts which we

\* Let us not suppose that at once, and by the force of a single resolution, we can become men of prayer. The spirit of devotion is the gift of God; it is a rare and costly gift: thou must seek it long and earnestly, and His grace will work it in thy heart. Devotion is a science high and difficult for such as thou art. Thou must practise it, and labour for it. Thou must pray *often*, if thou wouldst pray *well*; thou must condescend to be taught, to learn, to make gradual advances, if thou wouldst indeed be a master in this most blessed art; thou must know its sweetness, that thou mayest be held up in following after it; its difficulties, that thou mayest resist them. Their first onset must not scatter, nor their multitude alarm thee. In God's strength thou must wrestle with wandering thoughts; sap their strength by the countermines of watchfulness and self-denial; fly from them into quietness and separation; so shalt thou find in the wilderness of this world the mountain of God's presence, when He shall look in upon thy soul, and draw out all its hidden power and fragrance by the sunshine of His own countenance.

*Bp. S. Wilberforce.*

need, and which the world keeps continually from us—the thoughts which naturally feed our prayers; thoughts not of self, nor selfishness, nor pleasure, nor passion, nor folly, but of such things as are truly God's—love, and self-denial, and purity, and wisdom. These thoughts come by reading the scriptures; and strangely do they mingle at first with the common evil thoughts of our evil nature. But they soon find a home within us, and more good thoughts gather round them; and there comes a time when daily life, with its various business, which once seemed to shut them out altogether, now ministers to their nourishment.†

These are the words of one who has passed through the struggles in which we are now engaged, and has entered into his rest. And many have passed through them, and many are passing through them now, patiently and successfully; and we do well to think of them.

† *Dr. Arnold's Sermons.* Vol. IV. p. 86.

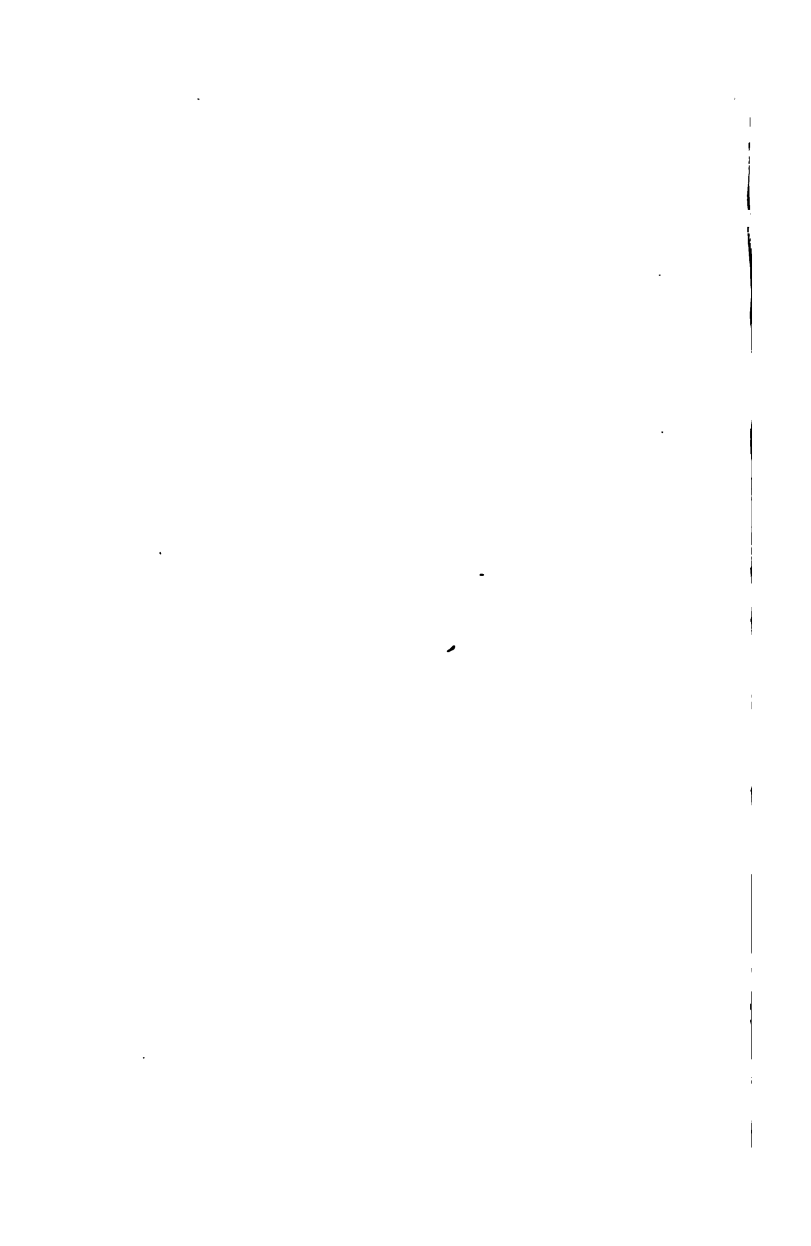
But we do better to think of Him, who, eighteen hundred years ago, was made man and lived among us, and became acquainted with all our difficulties and infirmities. He was so truly man, that He submitted to all the conditions of humanity. He grew up gradually to manhood. He was an infant and a boy. He learnt to walk. He learnt to read. He grew too in character. It is a wonderful thought; but the Scripture allows us to entertain it. What else do these passages mean? "He increased in wisdom," and, "He learnt obedience by the things which He suffered." It must have been so: for otherwise He would not have been man. But He was man, 'of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting.' Jesus Christ had a customary life. Jesus Christ had habits. He went about doing good. It was His *custom* to go into the Synagogue on the sabbath day.\* He was *wont* to teach the people.† He was *wont* to go to the Mount of Olives.‡ He went

\* Luke iv. 16. † Mark x. 1. ‡ Luke xxii. 39.

there for prayer and meditation, not for the sake of discovering and confessing sins of His own: He was without sin: but He went there for the sake of our sins, and to leave us an example, that we should follow His steps. And now He does not forget all that He knew and suffered on earth. He is well acquainted with all the details of our common human nature. He sees all our little struggles, and sympathizes in all. We talk of the rise and fall of kingdoms, and in our foolish wisdom distinguish between things important and things unimportant; but I cannot doubt that, in the eyes of our heavenly High-priest, few things are more important, than when He sees His weak disciples struggling with sins, because they are sins, and fighting against the flesh and the devil, because they are the enemies of God. He sees and feels it all; and He will bring it to a successful issue; for He is almighty, God as well as man. The work of our spiritual growth is His own work. He has "laid his hand upon us," and is "fashioning us

behind and before." Our "bones are not hid from Him, though we be made secretly," and no one sees our growth, and we perceive it not ourselves. Our bones are not hid from Him, though we be "fashioned beneath" upon the earth, to prepare us to be with Him where He is. His eyes "see our substance,"—our spiritual substance,—“yet being imperfect,” and “in His book are all our members written,”—are all the lineaments of that being, wherein we shall at length stand before Him, sinless and perfect. He is feeding us with the “milk of the word,” and the strong meat of His grace, and He will lead us on from strength to strength, till we appear in Zion, perfect men, with habits formed and characters prepared for the work and the happiness of heaven.

LAST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY, 1845.



**SERMON III.**



Nor will it avail to complain that we should not have been so fatally hardened, had the means of good been more sparingly given us; that we should have loved the service of the tabernacle more, had we been less familiar with it. The same page of Scripture which tells us of the sons of Eli, tells us of Samuel also. . . . Think we that the prayers, and vows, and sacrifices of the tabernacle service were less familiar to him than to them? If the daily offering were a weariness to them, why was it not so to him also? If God's so near presence did but harden their hearts, why did it strengthen and soften his? It is for us to choose whether we will be as Samuel, or as Hophni and Phinehas; whether we will gain the habit of profiting by holy things, or of despising them.

DR. ARNOLD.

## SERMON III.

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NOTWITHSTANDING THEY HEARKENED NOT UNTO  
THE VOICE OF THEIR FATHER, BECAUSE THE  
LORD WOULD SLAY THEM.—1 *Samuel* ii. 25.

“THE word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision.” We find these words in the first verse of the third chapter. The common means by which divine knowledge was obtained were precious; there was no open and miraculous manifestation of the will of God.

It was a period then very similar to that in which we are now living. To us the written word is precious. It is the only infallible source of divine knowledge. There is no open

vision in our days ; and we do not expect any open vision. While the word of the Lord abideth ever, prophecies (so far as we can see) have failed, tongues have ceased, miraculous knowledge has vanished away. God speaks to us by ordinary, common-place, uniform methods of instruction.

So He spoke to the Jews in the times we are about to consider, when the first conquests of Joshua were concluded, and the glorious age of Solomon had not yet come ; when the tabernacle was at Shiloh ; when Eli was an old man, and Samuel a boy. It was a pause in the history of the Jewish prophets. Moses had died, and with him the blaze of prophetic light which surrounded him had faded away. During all the time of the Judges, we read only of two persons gifted with prophetic power ; and these seem to have been connected chiefly with circumstances of a local and temporary interest. One of them was that prophet, whose name is unknown, who was sent to the Children of

Israel, when the Midianites and the Amalekites, and the Children of the East, came up with their cattle, and tents, and camels, and destroyed all the increase of the land.\* The other was Deborah the prophetess, who dwelt under the palm-tree of Deborah, between Rama and Bethel, and to whom the children of the Israelites came for judgment, at the time when the Lord had sold them into the hand of Jabin, the king of Canaan, the captain of whose host was Sisera, which dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles.† No great prophet arose between Moses and Samuel. St. Peter, in his second great sermon at Jerusalem, after having quoted that prediction of *Moses*, “a prophet shall the Lord your God raise up like unto me,” goes on to say, “yea, and all the prophets *from Samuel*, and those that follow after, ..... have likewise foretold of these days.”

Those days of Peter were days of miracles, times of the open vision. His first sermon was

\* Judges vi.

† Judges iv.

preached after all had been "filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues;" his second, after a lame man, well known as a suppliant for alms at the temple gate, had been publicly and suddenly healed in the name of Jesus. But now those days are past. Ours are times, not of the open vision, but of the preciousness of the written Word. The Church has moved on through various disasters and successes, but still advancing upon the whole, to a period of uniform instruction and stated worship. The first miraculous days of the preaching of the Gospel are left behind; and we have as yet to look forward to the great and glorious period, when that temple of Christ's body shall be revealed, which was destroyed by the Jews, and built in three days. We are born in a time when there is enough for our growth in knowledge, and enough for our growth in holiness; but when it is easy for us to overlook what is of highest moment, and easy to be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. we may expect to derive instruction from

what happened in a similar period of the history of the Jews.

The first difficulties in the conquest of Canaan had been overcome. Since that time Eglon the king of Moab had been strengthened against Israel, and oppressed them in the East ; but the son of Gerah had blown the trumpet in the mountain of Ephraim, and defeated them at the fords of Jordan. Afterwards, when the Canaanites in the North had mightily oppressed them, Deborah had trodden down their strength. When the Midianites had come in from the Desert, and made havoc in the corn fields, Gideon had slain their princes, Oreb and Zeeb, Zebah and Zalmunna.\* Jephtha had defeated the Ammonites ; and Samson had made sport of the Philistines towards the South and the West. Meanwhile, through defeat and victory, the frontier of the Jewish people had been pushed onward, and the taber-

\* See Psalm lxxxiii.

nacle had been removed from Gilgal,—one of those rocky eminences which overlook the plain of Jericho, where the Israelites had first set foot in Canaan,—to Shiloh, among the mountains of Ephraim, a central position in the land which had been conquered. Here the Tabernacle rested within its sacred Court, surrounded by the various houses or chambers which might be required for the services connected with the sacrifices. Hither the people came up to worship at the festivals. Eli was high-priest, and Hophni and Phinehas, his sons, were the priests of the Lord. Here too was Samuel, the child of his mother's prayers, whom she had devoted from his earliest years to the service of God. And here, in this sacred place of stated worship, and ordinary means of drawing near to God, we have an opportunity of observing how different are the effects produced upon the character by the same circumstances, according as they are used.

The persons of whom it is said that “they

hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the Lord would slay them," were Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, the priests of the Lord, who, even while they presided in the public worship, and superintended the daily sacrifices, were in the open practice of notorious and scandalous sin. The sons of the high-priest were "sons of Belial." The priests of the Lord "knew not the Lord." Their hearts were utterly hardened. It was the will of God to slay them. But in the same tabernacle, and associated with the same religious services, was another character, differing from theirs as much as it is possible for one character to differ from another. This was Samuel, the son of Elkanah and Hannah his wife, whom she had asked from the Lord, and dedicated from his infancy. "'For this child I prayed,' she said, 'and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him: therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent unto the Lord.' And he worshipped the Lord there." And there in the tabernacle he grew



up, an example to all future generations of early piety, of steady obedience, and of honest simplicity of heart.

It is instructive to observe the contrast of Hophni and Phinehas on the one hand, and this innocent child on the other, as it may be pursued through the second chapter of the First Book of Samuel. After Hannah's sweet hymn of thanksgiving,—the '*Magnificat*' of the Old Testament,—which is a beautiful prophecy of that hymn of our Lord's mother, which is preserved for us in St. Luke's Gospel, and also in the prayer-book;—and after the quiet mention of Elkanah's return to his house, and of Samuel's remaining to minister before the Lord, we have a description of the selfishness and profane rapacity of these wicked priests. They to whom a liberal portion of the sacrifices was set apart by the law, grasped at "all that the fleshhook brought up" from the cauldron. They who ought to have been patterns of obedience, broke in the most violent and public man-

ner a literal command most easy to be observed. They who ought to have guided others to all that was holy and good, associated in the minds of the people the religious ceremonies with feelings of disgust and abhorrence. "Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord: for men abhorred the offering of the Lord." And then, after this dark picture of profaneness and corruption, comes in, like a gleam from under a cloud, the mention of the child Samuel. "But Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child girded with a linen ephod." It is a beautiful picture to see him, with his little white ephod on his shoulders, moving innocently among the Levites, by the brazen laver, and the altar of burnt-offering, where the smoke of the morning and evening sacrifice ascended continually from the court; for into the tabernacle itself he was not, by the Levitical law, permitted to enter. He went not behind that curtain of blue, and purple, and scarlet,\* and saw not the candlestick and the

\* See Exodus xxxvi. 37.

altar of incense, and the golden table, which were garnished daily by the wicked hands of Hophni and Phinehas, whose hearts were so much farther off from God than his own. "Moreover his mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice." Every year she made him a coat, and brought it up at the festival; each year a larger one than the year before. She was sure of finding him at the tabernacle, as Jesus was found by his parents in the temple; of whom it is written, "He grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." So it is written of the child Samuel, that he "*grew* before the Lord." He grew in years—he grew in wisdom—he grew in holiness. And Hophni also and Phinehas *grew*—in wickedness and hardness of heart. A description of their sin follows, still more revolting than the former. By their lust and violence they made the worship of the one true God to be like the shameful and brutal festivals of the Moabites

and Canaanites. Their father warned them and expostulated. But in vain. Their wickedness was ripe. Their cup was full. Here it is that the words are written, "They hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the Lord would slay them." But once more the mention of Samuel steals gently into the narrative. After this black account of miserable and hopeless sin, a simple notice of the young prophet comes in again, as Sunday comes at the end of the week. "And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the Lord and also with men." He grew in favour with God, and God gave him favour in the sight of men. He lived among profligate and notorious sinners, but he was not corrupted; and in him was realised what is one of the most beautiful sights in the whole world,—a child preserving his innocence, simplicity, and integrity, when bad young men are setting him the example of profane and abominable sin.

Here then we see how the same circumstances may form different characters. If in anything the circumstances were different, the advantage was, I should imagine, on the side, not of Samuel, but of the sons of Eli. They were priests in the Holy Place: he was only a minister in the Court without. He saw his mother only once a year, as children who are at a distant school see their parents in the holidays. They lived always in the presence of their father; and he was an old man; and they could easily see the grief which their sin gave him. But still the result was, that he grew up to be a prophet, and that they were hardened and slain. And I wish to draw from this history a serious lesson, and to speak of *the effect of habits in hardening the heart*. And though I am recurring to a subject which I have spoken of more than once before, yet, since our end in meeting here is not novelty but instruction, since we come to church to seek not amusement but wisdom, I need not hesitate to preach three times on one subject.

And, if these were to be the last words uttered by me in this place, I do not think they could be better spent than in speaking of the growth and results of Habits.

I know that nothing which I can say will really explain all the difficulties of such a subject as that of *judicial blindness*; but we can easily see that to view it in connexion with the subject of *habits* is of the utmost practical importance. I cannot explain why such a tempest of burning sand should overwhelm, with its scorching and suffocating weight, so great a multitude of travellers on their journey through the desert; but I can see that that heap of sand consists of little grains, each of which adds something to the mass which overwhelms them. They are small, but they are many.\*

\* *Ista omnia si colligantur contra nos, non ideo non premunt, quia minuta sunt? Quid interest utrum te plumbum premat, an arena? Plumbum una massa est, arena minuta grana sunt, sed copiâ te premunt. Minuta sunt peccata. Non vides de guttis minutis flumina impleri? Minuta sunt, sed multa sunt.*—ST. AUGUSTINE.

Habits, it was remarked, if you remember, have three great results,—*readiness, unconsciousness, and change of mind*. First, when we have got a habit of doing anything, we do it more easily than before, and likewise are more inclined to do it than before;—secondly, when we are quite used to do this or that, we do it without thinking of it, and without remembering how we learnt to do it;—and thirdly, a customary course of life, continued through several years, is often observed to issue in a change of views and opinions. Now take these two last effects of a habit,—*unconsciousness and change of mind*,—and add them together,—and then say whether it could be otherwise than that, if a man continues in sin, in wilful sin, he must have a tendency to grow hopelessly hardened and utterly perverted. “The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh.” “Unto them which are without all these things are done in parables: that seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand.” Could it be otherwise? It is

true the effect is *judicial*; but it is *natural* too. It is a judgment inflicted by the Almighty, according to the operation of one of His own laws. God will not suspend the laws of His creation, though we be perverse and rebellious. When Adam fell, all his posterity fell with him, though millions were thereby involved in misery. This was (if we may so speak) the law of offspring—the principle that, as the parent is, so shall the children be. We all know the confusion that has followed upon the fall. But a far greater confusion might possibly have followed in God's world, if, because of man's sin, He had suddenly abolished one of those great principles on which it was created. And so, if a man turns away his steps from God, the clouds will gather over him; his mind will be darkened; he will believe a lie. This is the principle of gradual growth—the law of habits—and God will not abolish it, though it involve a soul in endless misery.

I well know that this does not explain the



difficulty. The difficulty cannot be explained. And it is instructive to observe, that the Scripture leaves it exactly where we find it—where we begin our inquiries, and where we end them. In the history of the plagues of Egypt, it is sometimes said that the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and sometimes that he hardened his own. That saying of our Lord's, which He spake on the first giving forth of His parables, was quoted just now from the Gospel of St. Mark. But St. Matthew gives the words thus :—"I speak to them in parables, *because* they seeing see not, and hearing hear not..... and in them is fulfilled the prophecy.....their ears are dull of hearing," (literally, "they have heard heavily with their ears")—"and their eyes have they closed ; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears."\* The problem is one which cannot be solved by Reason, and the Bible leaves it where Reason finds it ; but plain people can see that this way

\* Compare Matt. xiii. 13—15 with Mark iv. 11, 12.

of considering the subject in connexion with that of habits is the practical and the useful one. It brings it down at once from the clouds of speculation, and puts it upon the earth, where alone we have to deal with it for the present. And when thus we consider it, we soon perceive that it is a mere delusion, if men are scared away from religion by this, or any similar difficulty,—as though it were possibly the will of God that we are to be among the number of the hardened and the lost. It is indeed true, that if we resist Him or despise Him, He will slay us : and this truth is revealed in the Bible. But it is equally evident on an examination of the constitution of man. It is an article of the creed of habits. We can plainly see what God's will is, by looking at ourselves. We can plainly see that if we go on in sin, we are tending to become hardened and blind. The true idea of the Divine Will (for us) is not that of a stern necessity embracing us with its iron arms, so that we can neither move nor escape ; but rather we are to see that will as it is written

upon our own nature. The necessity which presses on us is the strength of that great principle that as we sow, so shall we reap. "He that soweth unto his flesh shall of his flesh reap corruption ; and he that soweth to the spirit shall of the spirit reap life everlasting." The power which surrounds us is the power of habits.

Say, then, if it pleases you, that it is the *will* of God to harden some, so that they may not be saved : but notice well that it is a necessary consequence of our natural constitution. It must so happen, unless God should make, for the sake of those who dishonour Him most, miraculous interferences with the order of His creation. Or rather, I would ask you to look upon this truth and dwell upon it, and couple with it the thought of God's unutterable love. Meditate upon the law of gradual growth and the invitations of God's mercy together. Put them in your mind, side by side, and then you will see the same truth in another form,—the

form in which the Gospel presents it. "This is the *will* of God, even your sanctification,"—that you should come to him and *grow*,—not in *sin*, but in *grace*,—not like Hophni and Phinehas, but like the child Samuel. This is the will of the God of Love,—the will of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is evident, then, that from this history of Samuel on the one hand, and Hophni and Phinehas on the other, an useful lesson may be drawn to ourselves. If these things took place in the midst of "carnal ordinances," and in a "worldly sanctuary;"\* it can hardly be supposed that the consequences of the like conduct are less serious to us,—for whom the vail hath been rent, and the Great High Priest hath entered once for all into the most holy place, and the sevenfold light of the Spirit is ever shining for all who will see it. It would

\* Heb. ix.

require a small amount of reflection to convince us that the same growth in piety and devotedness, or the same desperate drifting towards ruin and despair, must be going on among us who are here assembled ;—even if those words had never been written in the Book which teaches us the Christian meaning of the Tabernacle services,—the Epistle to the Hebrews ;\* “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To-day ; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”

If we apply this portion of Jewish history to our own times, the first and most obvious parallel to the case of Hophni and Phinehas is to be found in those ministers of the Gospel who abuse the office with which they are entrusted, for the purposes of their own gain, or the gratification of their love of praise.

\* Heb. iii. 12, 13. See vi. 4—12 ; and x. 11—31.

Filthy lucre, and empty popularity. If these are the things upon which their hearts are fixed, while their tongues are eloquent with the name of Christ, and their hands are occupied with the sacraments of the Gospel; there is such a contradiction between the several parts of their being, that the natural consequence must be, either a conscious unbelief, or a gradual unnoticed searing and hardening of the conscience. The light which they hold up to the eyes of others must be the dazzling and blinding of their own. The grace of repentance which God, through them, may dispense to His people, must be the drying up and parching of their own souls. For it is quite possible, that, while they are growing more and more empty, and the very stagnant pools are gradually sinking out of sight, they may be the means, under God, of liberating and building up His people; just as the drying up of the waters of the river of Babylon, in the time of Cyrus, was the setting free of the nation of the Jews, and the building of the

palaces thereof.\* Nor ought the Christian people to forsake the assembling of themselves together, or to imagine that God's grace cannot reach them, because they suppose that their ministers are influenced by unworthy motives. We find that Hannah, and Elkanah her husband, were not deterred from coming up at the yearly sacrifice, nor did God's blessing fail to comfort them, because that Hophni and Phinehas were the priests of the Lord.

They ought rather to pray for those who are set over them, and must give account. Yes: and to pray for themselves,—and to watch,—and be diligent. For they too must be either like the child Samuel, or like the sons of Eli;—either as the earth which “drinketh in the rain which cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, and receiveth blessing from God,”—or as “that which beareth thorns and briars, and

is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned;"—either such as are "not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises,"—or such as "fall away.....and crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame."\* It cannot be a matter of indifference, if a man comes to the ordinances of God with a heedless and indolent mind,—and if the sound of the Gospel falls idly on his ears, like some monotonous noise, which is half heard by one that is asleep. He is hardening himself. He is hardened of God. He is like the shell-fish on the sea-shore, where the tide rises and falls among the weeds with an easy motion and a pleasant sound. Its shell is hard and strong. But it was made, according to a law of God's natural world, gradually and surely, from the substance of its own body.

And let those who are young be well aware

\* See again Heb. x.



of the hardening effect of careless habits. Let them beware of those common sins which they commit at home, at school, at play, and in Church. You may say that they are little sins ; and I am sure I do not wish to make them worse than they are. But it is their constant repetition which makes them so important. Boys and Girls are apt to think that a little disrespect to their parents, provided they are not quite disobedient,—that a little idleness at their work,—a little quarrel in the playground,—a little inattention at Church,—are not very great offences. But think of the consequences of these things. Remember that this is the way in which the greatest sins begin. Remember that it is possible that by and by you may be quite unable to attend in Church,—that your temper may be quite spoilt,—that you may become notorious for your idleness,—that you may grow up to be a disobedient son or an undutiful daughter. Be what Samuel was in the Tabernacle at Shiloh, who said, “ Speak, Lord, for thy servant

heareth:" lest you become what Hophni and Phinehas were, who learnt to be able to say:—  
 'Let our father speak to us: and do thou too speak, O Lord; for we can listen without heeding.'

And let us all remember (for it concerns us all) how it is that Habits are formed. This is a lesson we all ought to know by heart. Habits, though they make things so easy, and though we follow them so unconsciously, are formed by Acts,—*general Habits by particular Acts*. The waters of a full river, that flows with an easy and uniform current, may be drawn off by level and customary channels, to water the surface of a whole life. But that river has been fed by little streams, which trickled down the sides of mountains, now left so far behind, that, if you turn to look for them, you can hardly see their outline in the distance. Oh! how little do we remember of those trifling actions, the results of which have been accumulating in the bright valleys of our childhood,

and through the long reaches of our maturer years, and have made us—what we are.

Bright valleys of our childhood! They sound like ironical words, when we think of the childhood of some of those who are living so near us:—children born in the midst of poverty, disease, and sin; whose young faces wear a grave and sorrowful expression which ought only to belong to later years; and whose young lives are spent far away from everything that is joyous and sacred. And some such children may, by your charity, be added to the number of those,—400 or nearly 400,—who are now under instruction in the Schools of this District. In asking you to contribute towards the maintenance and furtherance of these schools, I could not easily use any stronger argument, than that which has been already implied in all that has been said on the subject of Habits. I will simply prefer the request on their behalf in some borrowed words, as beautiful as they are true.

Wilt thou not help to educate the poor?

They will learn something, whether taught or no;

The mind's low dwelling hath an open door,

Whence, wandering still uneasy, to and fro,

It gathers that it should, or should not, know.

Oh, train the fluttering of that restless wing!

Guide the intelligence that worketh woe!

So shall the Summer answer to the Spring,

And a well-guided youth an age of duty bring.\*

May God give His blessing to everything you do on behalf of these children; and to everything, dear Brethren, (for this is still more important,) you do on behalf of yourselves,—every effort to break off the bands of your sins, every effort to make straight paths for your feet to walk in. Why should we not all “cease to do evil and learn to do well”? Why should those dreadful words be spoken of any of us, “His bones are full of the sins of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust?” Or those yet more dreadful words—“He hearkened not” unto the voice of warning, “because the Lord would slay” him?

\* “The Child of the Islands.” Summer, lvi. p. 75.

Finally, may we all have grace to remember that, as we cannot be Christ's disciples unless we are learning Christian habits, so we cannot learn Christian habits, without Christ. He must give us of His strength, or we shall fail through our own weakness. May He be with us—strengthening us if indeed we have begun to learn to do well, and if we have not begun, alarming us and drawing us to Himself, that we may begin to-day!

God be with us all. For the work is hard, and the time is short.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER, 1846.

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